1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

695 There was a disputed boundary between the village of Kurmer in the Chhota Dongar Mar *pargana* and the adjacent Kutru Mar village of Jatalur; the Jata clan asserted possession over a strip of land belonging to the Parllo clan of Kurmer. I suggested, on the strength of a tale I had heard of former Chiefs' methods of justice, that the head of each village should come with a cock to the land, and that the land should go to the clan whose cock crowed first. This was hailed by both sides as a sound solution, and off we went to the land; but just before we reached it the Jata headman began to hang back, and finally backed out of the test; I awarded the land to the Parllo clan to the approval of men present from other clans, and on going over the land found that it contained a *pagh'ai* or alternative village site of the Parllo clan besides the cromlech left to mark the site of the Village Mother's 'temple', the *kasyeq-gaita's udam-garia* or seat of honour, and the *kotokal* or line of menhirs erected in the name of the Parllo dead. Here the Jata clan finally abandoned their claim when challenged by the Parllo *kasyeq-gaita* to eat earth from under the Village Mother's cromlech.

181 To be left to live the free life of the hills, untrammelled by restrictions on his user of forest, earth and water or his right to shift his village and his *penda* cultivation, is the unconscious ideal of the Hill Maria. If he is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, he will beg to be hanged rather than be confined within walls; and few of them or of the wilder Bison-horn Marias survive long imprisonment.

517 [822] The Hill Maria shows great artistry in his bead-work, and is never at fault in his discrimination between colours and shades, though he uses for all shades of green and blue the one word *kaqarondla*. He has general terms also for red, white, black and yellow, but none for intermediate shades. In his houses he draws 532 rude cup-marking patterns, *swastikas* and strange creatures in white earth on his mud plaster, or makes rough clay representations of women's breasts. His songs are low and rather melancholic in 533 sound, the youths' voices verging on contralto; but they are far easier for an English ear to understand than Hindu music, and have often a haunting refrain. Both he and the Bison-horn Maria love to hear European records on a gramophone, especially a good soprano or contralto, sea shanties, and violins or trios and quartets playing light chamber music; but operatic fireworks merely provoke laughter, Chaliapin singing the 'Song of Prince Igor' making them [534] ache with laughter, but being often encored. The Marias as a whole have no musical instruments except drums. Though the 517 Bison-horn Maria does not show the Hill Maria's artistry and 153

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

colour sense in bead-work, it is noticeable that the best carpet weavers in Jagdalpur Jail are almost invariably Bison-horn Marias. They are quick to grasp intricacies of pattern, and there is hardly any pattern that they cannot copy. For years the chief instructor in the jail was the double murderer from Palnar already mentioned in this chapter.

The Marias of both kinds are very hospitable. On entering a Hill Maria village you are met by the elders and offered little gifts, an uncouth yam, or dried tobacco leaves and forest fruits. The whole village co-operates to get your camp ready, and to entertain you at night with song and dance. The occasional stranger from other Koitor villages or minor State official is housed and fed, provided he does not outstay his welcome or attempt to be exacting in his demands. Co-operation, in service to the State, in village festivals, in felling of forest for *penda* cultivation, in allotment of *penda* areas, in sowing, reaping, winnowing and storing of grain, in fishing and hunting, is the key to the social life of the Hill Maria, who is a natural communist; his hospitality is perhaps mainly an expression of his ingrained co-operation, though he is genuinely glad to see you after a long absence, and will greet you with tears of joy. The Bison-horn Maria is more of an individualist, or, rather, less of a communist, than the hill man, but he likes to entertain for a wedding or to celebrate the completion of a new *munda* (small rice irrigation tank) and similar occasions on a lavish scale, keeping open house. All Marias are extremely grateful for any benefit received and for sympathy and interest.

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2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AN EVENING IN THE GHOTUL

883 X
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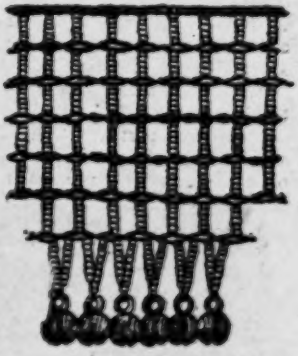
THE ghotul is very literally a night-club; it is only in the evening that there is 'a noise in the belly of the elephant'; during the day, except on festivals, it is deserted. The real life of the ghotul is in the firelight.

The conventions and routine of a ghotul evening are almost everywhere the same. I have spent a hundred evenings in all parts of the Muria area with the chelik and motiari and have found, on the whole, a remarkable similarity of custom. The Muria explain this by saying that all ghotul have developed from the first house at Semurgaon where Lingo himself prescribed the routine that should be followed.

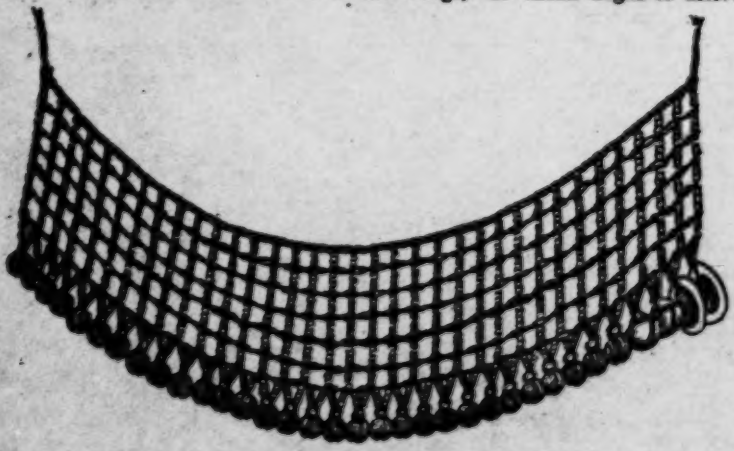


DETAIL

[301]

In the afternoon, motiari come to sweep, clean and cow-dung the buildings and court-yard. Their grass brooms are soon raising clouds of dust; rubbish is collected in basket or winnowing-fan and thrown away; cow-dung mixed with water is spread by hand over the floor. At sunset, someone often comes to arrange and light the fire; where there are no matches to light your pipe or lanterns to show you your way about, a fire serves more purposes than warmth and is needed even in the hot weather.

At any time after supper, it may be from 7.30 up to 9 p.m. according to the season and the circumstances of the village, the chelik begin to arrive.



[301]

FIG. 66. Bead belt with bells and cowries from Remawand. The beads are blue and white

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

X 883 S17 They come one by one, carrying their sleeping-mats and perhaps their drums. The little boys bring their daily 'tribute' of wood, 'clock in' by showing it to the official responsible and throw it in a corner. The elder boys gather round the fire; one takes a half-smoked leaf-pipe from his turban and ignites it by placing a bit of glowing wood in the cup, another plays a few notes on his flute, a third spreads his mat and lies down. The Kotwar inspects the buildings to see if the girls have done their work properly. The Sirdar comes in tired and calls a youngster to massage his legs. Gradually all the boys assemble.

At the same time the motiari are collecting near by, in someone's house, or just round the corner; at Binjhli and other villages where there is a special girls' house they gather there laughing and chatting generally, I was told, about the day's encounters with the chelik. If a group of girls have to come some distance, as from another hamlet, they often sing on the way.

Then at last the girls come in, with a rush, all together and gather round their own fire. After a while they scatter, some sitting with the boys, others singing in a corner, some lying down. Nearly always there are boys and girls who are tired after the long day's work at home, and these lie down at once in a corner or in one of the smaller huts—to lie flat on the face with head buried in the arms is a popular ghotul attitude when one is alone. [516]

The others occupy the time in pleasant harmony; sometimes they dance for an hour or two; the smaller children play rampageous games; sometimes they just sit round the fire and talk; in the hot weather on a moonlit night you will see them scattered all about the compound. Often they sing lying down, two by two, chelik with motiari, or in little groups. A boy tells a story; they ask riddles; they report on the affairs of the day; there may be a ghotul trial; they plan a dancing expedition or allot duties at a wedding. I shall never forget the sight in some of the larger ghotul of 60 or 70 youngsters thus engaged.

Among songs, the most popular are the taunt songs which boys and girls sing against each other, especially those with proper names that can be changed to suit the occasion. Everybody in turn is paired off, often with forbidden relatives; one after another they are caught in compromising situations; they are engaged, married and divorced, re-married. [533]

Songs

X 883 539

1

Re re la rela re re la rela re re la

Korka ta doyo oiki helo tiloka.	O my little sister Tiloka, take the cow out of the cow-shed.
Tāna osi bāra kiyākān dāda silledār?	Why should I take the cow from the shed, O brother Silledar?
Mekwāl kopāl lewa bāra kiyākān?	There is no grazier, Kopa, why should I take it?
Bāra na dāya oiki helo tiloka?	O little sister Tiloka, what do you want?
Guda ta gino oiki helo tiloka.	Take the pig from its sty, Tiloka.
Tāna bāra kiyākān dāda silledār?	Why should I take the pig from its sty, O brother Silledar?
Konār ta kor oiki helo tiloka.	O little sister Tiloka, take the hen from inside the house.

AN EVENING IN THE GHOTUL

Tôna bôra hiyûkûn dâda silledâr ?	Why should I take out the hen, O brother Silledar?
Bâra na dâye oiki helo tiloka ?	O little sister Tiloka, what do you want?
Sanduk ta rupiya oiki helo tiloka ?	Will you take the rupee from the box?
Tôna nana bâra hiyûkûn dada silledar ?	Why should I take the rupee from the box, O brother Silledar?
Jhâpi ta chocko oiki helo tiloka ?	O little sister Tiloka, will you take the cloth hidden in the basket?
Tôna nana oikûn dâda silledâr !	Yes, brother Silledar, I will take the cloth hidden in the basket, O brother Silledar!

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2

This song is from Manegaon and has the refrain *Suy ale helo le.*

Pôt paroda pâlor podela.	On the ant-hill grows a *kurai* tree.
Bag ne pungâr puyta injore.	The flower has blossomed, sister.
Bor dâdûn mihchi oye rôt ?	Who are you going to give the flower to, sister?
Laharu dâdûn mihchi oye rôt.	I will pin the flower on Laharu.
Tirka hâya tâla injore ;	That boy's head is like the *tirka* fruit;
Bese pungâr pâga injore ;	His turban is like the *kusu* flower;
Pâgûl pungâr mihchi hiyûkûl,	I will pin the flower on his turban,
Udimy mut-ka mamût hiyûkûl,	I will give him a blow with my fist,
Durro poy-nai mamût bilkat.	And quickly I will run away.

3

Barpela Post Oyna Pata

This song, with its refrain, *He dâda saidar*, addressed to the head of the ghotul, is called 'The Song of Carrying off by Force'.

Barang sarpâr te sulitou saidar ?	Why are you sitting in the middle of the road, Saidar?
Badenko ine sulitou ?	Whom are you waiting for, Saidar?
Alonâuk ine sulitou.	You are waiting for Alosa, Saidar.
Koido arka poyni katka ite kandu.	She went with her pot for water, Saidar.
Talût kumâr hinkun katka ite kandu.	She had a roll on her head, Saidar.
Sarpâr tâko kandu.	She came along the road, Saidar.
Tôna ine poyandi.	You caught hold of her, Saidar.
Aye aye indu.	She said, 'No, no', Saidar.
Tuta tônu ondi saidar.	You dragged her to the jungle, Saidar.

After an hour or two of dancing, singing, games or story-telling, certainly not much after ten o'clock, the serious business of the evening begins. The younger boys, those who have not yet been given titles or excused their tributes of wood, go round to every senior boy beginning with the leader (but not afterwards following any special order) saluting each with Johar followed by the ghotul title—'Johar Sirdar', 'Johar Kotwar', 'Johar Silledar'. But for greeting relatives, the term of relationship is used—'Johar *dâda*', 'Johar

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2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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māma' and so on. As they give the salute they stretch out their hands, sometimes both hands, lower and then raise them in a pretty gesture. Often

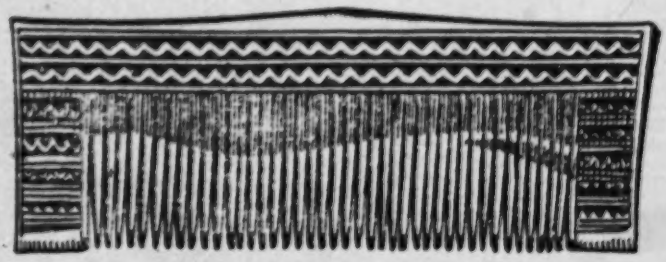

FIG. 67. Carved wooden comb from Toinar
Length 6"

they only use one hand, laying it on head or shoulder; in the east of Kondagaon they put both hands on the head.

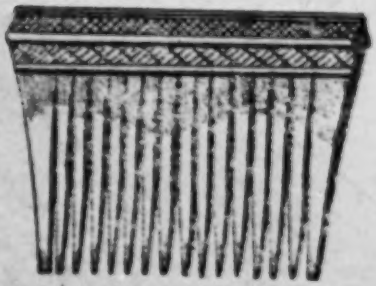

FIG. 68 A comb from the Narayanpur Tahsil
Width 2¼"

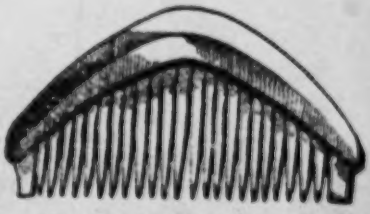

FIG. 69. A comb from Phulpar
Width 3¼"

When the boys have finished, the motiari go round in the same way, with the same gestures and salutes, generally speaking in high, almost artificial voices. In Phulpar the girls did not say Johar, but repeated the ghotul title twice, thus—'Gaita, Gaita' or 'Kotwar, Kotwar'. A girl should not salute a boy to whom she is betrothed or her Lamhada, and she must be very careful about using the proper terms of relationship—for by this means she is reminded of the tribal laws of avoidance. In some ghotul this ceremony is performed twice, once when the company first assembles and

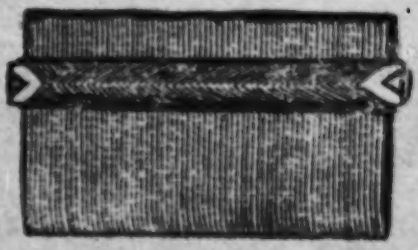

FIG. 70. A bamboo comb, of a type sometimes made by Muria for sale in the bazaars
Width 2¾"

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

then again at the usual time. At Palari, where the girls take the boys' *massi*-mats home with them every morning and bring them in the evening, the first salutation is called *Massi-johar*, for it is then they give the mats to their chelik.

In some ghotul, especially those where they do not massage every night, the two leading girls crack the boys' fingers as they go round.

Immediately after the Joharni, a girl distributes finely-powdered tobacco and sometimes a supply of leaf-pipes to the boys. The tobacco is taken from the ghotul store, to which all must contribute.

The motiari often go outside for a few minutes. The Belosa may now arrange how the massage is to be done and decide whether they will sleep in the ghotul that night and, if so, how they will pair off. When they are ready they come back into the ghotul and each girl goes straight to a boy to comb his hair and massage him. There does not seem to be any rule about this. A girl is not bound to massage her own ghotul partner, nor does the fact of massaging imply that the two will sleep together. In practice, however, the elder girls generally massage the elder boys.

In the Chota Dongar Pargana, the girls go to massage the chelik in the very place where they are going to sleep. Elsewhere they sit in a circle or grouped round the fire, sometimes scattered about the room. If the boy is asleep the motiari rouses him and makes him sit up; she sits or kneels behind him, very close, with her knees round his body. With her comb she begins to shake out and arrange the boy's hair.

The combs are small and it is often difficult to get them through the long unruly locks of the chelik. In Masora the method of combing was to tap the head rather roughly, then to twist the comb round, digging it into the skull; then the hair was pulled out and fretted and at last tied again into a bun. The digging in of the edge of the comb is known as *pitis pitis hiyēna*; it is intended to kill lice and clear away scurf.

In Pupgaon, the combing was much gentler, and was only done every three days. In Bandopal, the girls did not tap the head but twisted the comb through the hair and rubbed the scalp in a very soothing way. When we were at Binjhli they were not combing at all, and in Khutgaon after a dog had relieved itself on the leader's turban, the Siraha forbade the girls to touch the chelik's heads. But generally the combing is done in the way I have described. When a lot of girls are at it together, the clicking of the combs against a score of hard heads makes a remarkable noise, reminding me of a phrase by Roy Campbell:

> While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled,
> Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.

But this is not the end of the comb's work. The motiari now uses it to titillate the skin of the back and arms. She rubs the points of the comb very gently to and fro, up and down, over the back and then when she has massaged that, takes each arm in turn and runs the comb up and down the skin.

Now the massage begins. In many ghotul (in Binjhli, for example, and in Bandopal and Almer among many others) this is done with the oily waste of the mahua or karanji seed, and cleans as well as refreshes. In Gorma, in May when they burn *dabi*, they massage the whole body with karanji waste. 'For in the old days this is how Tallur Muttai used to massage Kadrengal.' In other ghotul and at other seasons the massage is done with the hands alone.

The motiari begins by passing her open hands gently over the back, rubs a little harder, presses back on the ball of the hand, pushes more and more vigorously and always upward till the chelik nearly falls forward on his face,

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947. AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER TWENTY

DANCE AND SONG

I

DANCE and song, games, stories and riddles should not be regarded as mere recreation; in the Muria's eyes they are serious and important business. A ghotul's reputation largely depends on the excellence of its dancing; the motiari's ability to sing may make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful wedding. Even the games, many of them, serve an educational purpose. The younger boys and girls are carefully trained in the ghotul, and the others practise night after night, repeating the same steps and rhythms again and again till they get them right, before they set out on a dancing expedition. The complicated stick-dances need special training and practice, for once an expedition has started mistakes are regarded as ill-omened.

The first musician was Lingo himself, and the practice of music is not held, as so often in India, to be discreditable, but is honourably rooted in the history and mythology of the tribe. Many of the songs and dances have a religious purpose, and often begin with an invocation to Lingo and other gods. Before the Mandri dances at a wedding, worship should be performed before a pile of drums.

It is refreshing to go to Bastar from the reform-stricken [1] and barren districts of the Central Provinces. As you climb the Keskal Ghat the whole countryside bursts into song about you. The Muria have a short way with 'reformers', as I was fortunate enough to see at Telenga village on 26 March 1941. There was a marriage that day in the village, and the chelik and motiari from eleven villages came to attend it. But when they arrived they did not begin to dance as usual, but went out into the jungle for a consultation. They had seen among the wedding guests the sinister figure of Chainu, the headman of Maragaon. A month earlier this Chainu had attended a marriage at the house of Guma in his own village. Chelik and motiari had come as usual and danced till noon. Then according to custom they asked for liquor to offer to the drums and food for themselves. Chainu, who had been under a good deal of Hindu influence, refused to let them have either liquor for the drums or food for themselves, and declared that he would 'stop this dancing throughout the pargana'. The chelik and motiari left the marriage in protest and for a month the matter was the subject of heated discussion in their ghotul.

Now in Telenga the boys saw their chance. After a long discussion, they came back, a large and formidable crowd, and told the Pargana Manjhi (of Chalka) that they wanted a panchayat and that Chainu must be there. Near the marriage-booth the boys assembled in a great circle, and almost all the wedding guests joined to see what would happen. The unfortunate bride and bridegroom were left sitting in their places, entirely forgotten.

[1] It is very hard to understand the mentality of the 'reformers' who would deprive the aboriginal of his beautiful and innocent recreations, and would impose on him a 'Shiv-raj' (as it is often called) at which the great dancer Natarajan would have shuddered. It is interesting to compare the attitude of the American Negro towards the 'Spirituals' which have done as much as anything else to establish him throughout the world. At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these were considered fit only for uneducated 'country niggers'. 'As late as 1909, Negro students at Howard University rebelled and refused to sing them. By the more progressive and aggressive elements in the race the spirituals were frowned upon as a reminder of slavery and ignorance.'—N. I. White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Harvard, 1928), p. 3. Then suddenly, they became the fashion, and the Negroes found that nothing gave them more credit and prestige.